

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
April 3, 2003

Attendees:

Ken Currey	Dan Rosenthal	Van Graham	Jane Ross
Art Donoho	Bob Silbernagel	Terry Gray	Bob Sherrill
John Foster	Russ Walker	Scott Larson	Cindy Sherrill
Greg Gnesios	Gene Arnesen	Mel Lloyd	Harold Snyder
Warren Gore	B. Boeschstein	Harley Metz	Palma Wilson
Doug Hall	Shaun Deeney	Lynae Rogers	Steve Yamashita
	Jim Dollerschell		

Greetings and Introductions

Chairman Warren Gore called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. A round of introductions followed and representatives present this afternoon from the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) were invited to take the floor for discussion on the desert bighorn sheep populations in the surrounding areas.

Colorado Division of Wildlife: Discussion of Domestic and Wild Sheep Issues

Van Graham, CDOW wildlife biologist, explained that, working closely with the Bureau of Land Management, bighorn sheep from Arizona and Nevada were transplanted in what is now the Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area (CCNCA) by CDOW in 1979. The herd did well initially, but mountain lion predation in recent years has negatively impacted the population. An additional transplant in 1995 supplemented the declining population, and current statistics show that the population is increasing once again.

Cooperative agreements have been executed between the Colorado National Monument (COLM) and CDOW, and the Desert Bighorn Sheep Management Plan was developed, addressing range issues involving domestic sheep and desert bighorn sheep. It was initially recommended that a 9-mile buffer be created for separating domestic sheep from the bighorn, but this recommendation was eventually dropped because of the concern woolgrowers had over the impact this would have on private landowners with domestic sheep herds. The existing agreement was developed in close coordination with the public and other interested stakeholders. The CDOW's main concern is domestic sheep infecting bighorn sheep with the pasteurella virus. The CDOW had hoped that the distance maintained between the two species would prove to show less die-off among bighorn sheep. Although no domestic sheep grazing is

present south of the Colorado River within the CCNCA today, some in the community had concerns at the time with totally banning domestic sheep grazing permanently within the planning area. Natural or manmade barriers and aggressive herding are some other methods suggested for maintaining the critical separation between the two species. No problems with pasteurella have been encountered to date within the CCNCA, but bighorn sheep seem to stay in the upper ends of the canyons as well as the west-end of the COLM, maintaining a safe distance from domestic sheep.

Warren asked whether the CDOW would like to see additional or revised recommendations for the CCNCA bighorn sheep herd. CDOW staff responded that they remain satisfied with existing management guidelines as stated in the CDOW Desert Bighorn Sheep Plan (1997), and recommend no changes be made at this time.

It has been confirmed that Chris Jouflas no longer holds a sheep-grazing permit, and only one such permit currently exists within the CCNCA. This permit is located near the Utah border and managed out of the BLM Moab (Utah) office.

BLM Rangeland Management Specialist Jim Dollerschell explained that allotments south of the Colorado River already have existing grazing agreements that eliminated sheep grazing. The river does provide an important natural barrier between the two species.

Harley Metz, BLM ecologist, explained the BLM management policy concerning desert bighorn sheep. A system was needed to discourage the die-offs, and various bighorn sheep organizations and field experts assisted in developing the existing policy, The Revised Guidelines for Management of Domestic Sheep and Goats in Native Wild Sheep Habitat (September 30, 1998). Harley provided additional information, including a technical reference produced by the Desert Bighorn Sheep Council discussing the issues and proposing anywhere from 2- to 20-mile buffer zones. The question for both the BLM and this Advisory Council is whether future sheep grazing should be allowed when a permit to do so is requested. Although some unknown factors exist, some areas north of I-70 could be considered after conducting a thorough study.

Van added that new guidelines exist for reintroducing both desert and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. These species were native to many areas, but conflicts with domestic sheep grazing prevent releases in some of these native areas. The CCNCA herd is not native to that area.

Advisory Council Vice Chairman Bob Silbernagel suggested that a few alternatives be combined, forming the following statement:

Restrict domestic sheep use in the Lower Bench and Colorado Ridge allotments and north of Black Ridge via existing agreements. Future sheep grazing would be analyzed on a case-by-case basis following the recommendations of the 1997 CDOW Desert Bighorn Sheep Management Plan.

Bob Silbernagel's suggestion was formally motioned and unanimously passed by the Advisory Council. This statement would now be considered as part of alternative 3.

Final Discussion on Wilderness Alternatives

The Advisory Council had the following comments and recommendations regarding the proposed alternatives for the Wilderness area.

Trail Proposals: This recommendation should stipulate access for search and rescue and other administrative uses, as outlined in existing Memorandums of Understanding (MOU).

Spur Roads: Road I, which was also addressed by the Wilderness Working Group, should also be noted. Use restrictions should stipulate "except as needed for administrative use and allotment agreements."

Dispersed Camping: A clarification in that BLM allow *designated* dispersed camping, and Road I should be included in this recommendation as well. Any additional campsites are to be designated dispersed campsites.

Future Demand: Both future demand and resource impacts should dictate the need for additional parking. At such time, the Knowles Canyon Trailhead should be moved to Road F and expanded to accommodate additional parking.

Harold Snyder and Terry Gray, participants in the Wilderness Working Group, accepted this variance from their group's recommendations.

Art Donoho asked why the Advisory Council couldn't just recommend that action be taken now, and Warren explained that Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) should apply. The wishes of the Wilderness Working Group were to leave the area as pristine as possible, and these wishes should be honored as much as possible.

Dirt Roads: The BLM should develop a management plan for BS road allowing spot graveling and other improvements as necessary. Doralyn Genova, a Mesa County commissioner on the Advisory Council, promoted this recommendation but was not present at today's meeting.

CCNCA Planning Team Leader Jane Ross suggested that this recommendation could be common to all alternatives, and everyone agreed.

Camping Proposal—Woodcutting or Gathering: No woodcutting or gathering allowed *south* of the Wilderness boundary (not north).

Desired Future Condition—Minimal Signage: Provide informational kiosks at gateways to the Wilderness, but keep signage to a minimum inside the Wilderness zone. The purpose is to prevent sign pollution.

Desired Future Condition—South of Wilderness: Minimal maintenance of roads, except for improvements to BS road as necessary per the above recommendation under “Dirt Roads.”

A motion was made to accept the Wilderness recommendations with the noted amendments and passed unanimously.

Wilderness Front Country Discussion

Greg Gnesios, CCNCA Manager, explained that three meetings were held with the purpose of addressing a number of issues concerning the popular Wilderness Front Country. The CCNCA staff developed a summary of the group’s recommendations (see attached), and BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner Gene Arnesen noted that these recommendations would be added to the Wilderness zone portion of the alternatives document.

Various agencies and organizations, along with Fruita Monument High School, were involved in these meetings. Front country recommendations were designed to be general in nature to allow for a flexible management policy.

Greg reported that establishing an inter-agency visitors center, proposed to be a one-stop shopping public land center, is being discussed by the COLM, BLM, CDOW, Colorado State Parks, and city of Fruita. The Dinosaur Museum and the Fruita Welcome Center are two possible locations being considered.

Bennett Boeschstein, Fruita community development director, is looking forward to working with the BLM and other agencies in developing this visitor center. Both Highway 340 and Kings View Road will receive improvements. The Colorado Department of Transportation plans to install a CCNCA sign at Kings View Road and Highway 340. An effort is underway to consolidate and organize signage on the Interstate near Fruita.

Bennett reported that yesterday’s meeting was productive regarding the acquisition of Snooks Bottom, and Fruita hopes to move forward on the project. While Fruita has Great Outdoors Colorado funding that must be used in the near future, BLM funding for the land acquisition is uncertain.

COLM Superintendent Palma Wilson explained that BLM land adjacent to the historic Fruita Dugway might provide parking for that trail’s access. The Dugway is on COLM land but the monument has no area suitable for parking.

Greg indicated that BLM is also working with the Bureau of Reclamation and CDOW to better manage the small canyons lying beyond Pollock Bench. The use of paint balls and motorized vehicles has become a problem, and signs and fencing are being installed in an attempt to alleviate these activities.

The Advisory Council asked whether BLM could provide a brief matrix for review, prior to their approving the Wilderness Front Country recommendations. Jane suggested the group approve the recommendations in order to stay on schedule, and the BLM would then forward a matrix for review, allowing for any issues found at that time to be addressed. Based on this, the Advisory Council approved the motion to accept the Wilderness Front Country recommendations.

Advisory Council Recommendation of Preferred Alternative

Jane proposed that the group officially recommend the preferred alternative during this meeting, but the Advisory Council had some concerns with the revised alternatives presented today by BLM range and ecology staff. Art Donoho particularly had concerns with BLM's involvement in wildlife management and mentioning specific animal species. Art felt strongly that by mentioning prairie dogs, the BLM was encouraging the animal's proliferation, and he wanted the wording struck from the document. Harley explained that any vegetation restoration work performed would be in part to improve wildlife habitat, and the degree of details mentioned is needed to assist the reader in better understanding justifications for land health improvement within the CCNCA. Because this wording appeared in the vegetation section of the document, BLM staff agreed to strike the wording mentioning specific animals. The sentence will now end with a period after "resources."

At Warren's suggestion, the wording addressing grazing restrictions in canyons needs to be more specific and proposed the following:

With voluntary cooperation from permittees, restrict livestock grazing in Jones, Mee, Knowles, and Rattlesnake Canyons to protect riparian values.

It was noted that both rangeland and vegetation sections, reflecting the discussed amendments, will be incorporated into the alternatives document.

It was pointed out that dog restrictions are to be included in the alternatives document as common to all.

A motion was made for the Advisory Council to adopt alternative three, with amendments discussed at today's meeting, as the preferred alternative for the CCNCA RMP. The motion passed unanimously.

BLM Update

Greg Gnesios provided an update on BLM and CCNCA staff activities. CCNCA staff recently briefed the BLM Colorado State Director in Denver, with additional presentations made to State Office program leads, as well as the Department of Natural Resources.

Benefits-based Management (BBM) will be incorporated into the CCNCA RMP but on a limited basis. The CCNCA staff is striving to develop a plan that is thorough yet succinct and reader friendly. The focus of BBM can be extremely detailed and cover minutiae that might veer from the goals and objectives of this RMP. The Advisory Council agreed with this strategy to limit charts and chains of causality in the RMP.

A "Public Open House" has been scheduled for May 1, 3:00 to 8:00 p.m., at the Museum of Western Colorado, located at 4th and Ute Avenue in Grand Junction. Members of the Advisory Council will participate with the BLM in this opportunity for the public to receive a status update on the CCNCA plan's progress, as well as to ask questions and offer valuable feedback at this stage of developing the RMP. The media will be invited to attend prior to the 3:00 p.m. start, and presentations and exhibits will be featured throughout the evening.

The USGS visitor survey, a project presented to the Advisory Council last fall, was recently approved at the Washington level. USGS staff will be arriving soon to conduct the survey, which will focus on visitor experiences within the CCNCA, as well as attitudes toward a user fee program.

While funding has been approved for the fiscal year, the funds allow for planning requirements and desired improvements but not for any additional permanent employees for implementing these initiatives.

Corrections to March 6 Meeting Minutes

Both Warren and Bob Silbernagel agreed that wording in last month's meeting minutes addressing wildlife monitoring should be changed to reflect, "Monitoring should be conducted by both the CDOW and U.S. Fish and Wildlife."

Public Comment

Palma reported that the COLM, which is in the process of developing its own general management plan, has chosen its preferred alternative. Prior to getting approval from National Park Service (NPS) management, COLM staff wanted to make sure that its preferred alternative complements that of the CCNCA's. Palma believes that both agencies have compatible preferred alternatives, and the COLM will now schedule a briefing with the NPS director.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

AGENDA

Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area Advisory Council Meeting

April 3, 2003

- Greetings and introductions
- Final discussion on Wilderness alternatives
- Wilderness Front Country discussion
- Division of Wildlife
 - Discussion of domestic and wild sheep issues
- Advisory Council recommendation of preferred alternative
- BLM Update
 - Briefing to CO State Director, DNR and State Office review team
 - Public Open House
 - USGS visitor survey update
- Public Comment Period

Wilderness Front Country Recommendations

All dogs need to be on leash in high-use areas, including parking areas, trailheads, campgrounds, and areas where safety is a concern. Dogs are not required to be on leash in other areas, but must be under voice control.

Develop methods to control dog waste in high-use areas when dog waste becomes a problem.

Work closely with Colorado National Monument, the City of Fruita, and the urban interface community adjacent to Colorado Canyons NCA regarding, but not limited to the following:

- Fruita
 - Snooks Bottom parcel
 - Trails connectivity
 - Gateway Community
- Colorado National Monument
 - Trail connectivity
 - Management consistency
- Urban Interface
 - Community needs
 - Resource protection

Work with local schools to resolve resource concerns at Dinosaur Hill and NCA land along Kings View Road.